

Ranch Life Was Once Enlivened By Swarms Of Farm Magazine Peddlers

By Monte Noelke

5-9-68

Page 9

MERTZON — The ranch-to-ranch peddler has abandoned this part of the Shortgrass Country. Where once the countryside abounded in traveling men hawking marvelous livestock potions and fantastic magazine offers, the glib operators have disappeared from the scene.

In former times, magazine salesmen led the pack. They were thicker than horn flies after a wet spring. Multitudes of trial subscriptions were sold on the front porches of ranch houses; in peak years the traffic in reading material would have overloaded the biggest library in Washington, D. C.

It was a gratifying experience to deal with the magazine hucksters. Unlike other money-grabbing humans, the entire corps was selling magazines to gain enough points to (1) go through school or (2) send their grandmothers on a trip to the Holy Land. As a matter of fact, that may be the reason there aren't any drummers any more. There wouldn't be much sense in their knocking on doors after they'd won their college education or had fulfilled their lifelong dream of sending the old granny overseas.

Buying from these peddlers was similar to dealing with our own people, every last one of them was raised on a ranch or farm. I can't recall an agent coming by who didn't open his spiel kind of like this: "You know, partner, I was brought up on a little place just like yours. It shore does make me homesick to see you and the little woman living here, sweating and slaving and carrying out the Good Lord's mission. I sure wish I'd never left the old home outfit."

After that, you had to buy something to cheer him up. Nothing on this earth is as sad as a country boy displaced from his homestead. However, it never was clear how so many salesmen lived on ranches that resembled ours. But this is a mighty big old world. For all I know, there may be thousands of outfits that look exactly like this one.

These salesmen's wares consisted mainly of farm magazines. For two or three dollars you could buy a 44-year non-revocable subscription to, say, the "Paducah Plum Pruner's Tribune." By halfway reading the journal you could learn how to convert horse-drawn cultivators into snow plows; how to make chicken coops into fool-proof arctic wolverine traps; or the latest methods of changing fig orchards into olive groves.

Some old cranks on our ranches pointed out that the Shortgrass Country didn't need that class of information. But you know how it goes. Every society is composed of a few old close-minded cusses who think ranching is the only thing that deserves to be written about. Any category of ignoramus should have been able to get his subscription investment back in 44 years, even if he read nothing but the baby chick advertisements.

The rangelands are more lonesome than ever, now that the magazine peddlers are gone. Occasionally an insurance man comes by to liven the surroundings with news concerning the rising price of appendectomies or the spiraling cost of ambulance service, but nobody passes here selling reading material.

What's lost is lost. The next generation will probably grow up almost illiterate, never knowing of the good old days when magazine peddlers covered the land.